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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002021

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [Z1](#)

SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE'S BIOTECH BROUHAHA

Classified By: Political Officer Kimberly Jemison for reasons 1.5 (b) a
nd (d).

11. (C) Summary. On 1 September, while attending the WSSD in South Africa, Lands, Agriculture, and Rural Resettlement Minister Joseph Made proclaimed that Zimbabwe would not accept food aid containing genetically modified organisms. He also said there was nothing to discuss with the U.S. since the Zimbabwean people would not be used as guinea pigs. The latest development in the biotechnology-derived food aid saga is not surprising, but does stymie our efforts to get food into Zimbabwe. This latest contradiction between Agriculture Minister Joseph Made and Social Welfare Minister July Moyo suggests a lack of consensus and objectives within the Cabinet on the issue of food. The ambiguity over biotechnology-derived foods, in addition to Zimbabwe not signing the memorandum of understanding with the WFP for a 17500 MT maize swap, puts into question the GOZ,s commitment to securing and providing food for its people and forces us to consider alternatives, such as providing wheat in lieu of maize. Before that though, WFP Director James Morris arrives in Zimbabwe today, September 4, for meetings with Zimbabwean officials that, we hope, will lead to a clear GOZ decision to go forward with the maize swap arrangement. END SUMMARY.

MADE REJECTS BT FOOD

12. (U) On 1 September, while attending the WSSD in South Africa, Lands, Agriculture, and Rural Resettlement Minister Joseph Made proclaimed that Zimbabwe would not accept food aid containing genetically modified organisms. He also said there was nothing to discuss with the U.S. since the Zimbabwean people would not be used as guinea pigs. While we have not seen a full text of Made's remarks, other press accounts made it seem that he was referring only to unmilled biotechnology-derived (BT) maize.

13. (U) Until this outburst, Zimbabwean officials had only rarely cited human health regarding the import of BT food, and never in their discussions with us. Zimbabwe,s scientific community had already approved the use of BT foods for human consumption but had reservations about BT seed germination, cross-pollination, and its potential effect on the environment as well as commercial trade with the E.U.

MOYO ACCEPTS BT FOOD

14. (C) On 29 August, Regional WFP Coordinator Judith Lewis told USAID that she had spoken with July Moyo, Minister of Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare, and he indicated that he would get the maize swap completed quickly. He also said he was not aware of any problems and thought the transfer was a done deal. In addition to Moyo accepting BT foods as safe, Health Minister David Parirenyatwa began his speech at a World Health Organization technical meeting of health ministers in Harare last week, with comments that BT foods are very safe for human consumption. More recently on September 3, Moyo stated to U.N./WFP officials that Made,s statements at the Summit do not necessarily reflect final GOZ policy on this subject. NOTE. Minister July Moyo had offered in writing to swap 17,500 tons of U.S. BT, whole-kernel maize for an equivalent amount of maize in its own reserves. The GOZ would then mill and distribute the U.S. maize while WFP would distribute the Zimbabwe maize. This was intended to be a one-time deal but would most likely set a precedent for potential future swaps. END NOTE.

15. (C) In spite of Moyo,s stated willingness to accept the maize swap, Zimbabwe has not signed the memorandum of understanding with the WFP, according to Victor Angelo, the UN Resident Representative. In a meeting with the Ambassador on September 1, Angelo also denied press reports that the GOZ has stopped efforts to import grain and would rely solely on donated food.

ALTERNATIVES TO MAIZE

16. (C) If the issue of BT maize cannot be resolved, we will need to consider other alternatives. Judith Lewis has suggested an alternative to maize in the form of an exchange of U.S. Emerson Trust wheat with the GOZ for maize for WFP. Under such an arrangement, the wheat would go to private sector millers and be distributed through the local market channels. We understand why WFP would want to secure the swapped maize for distribution but question if this might be an unnecessary wrinkle. Transferring the maize from the GOZ to WFP does nothing to address the overall maize deficit but may help circumvent grain trading restrictions. In this zero-sum game simply providing U.S. wheat through private sector channels might be the best recourse, and at least close the gap in urban areas, but we would have to look closely at how this would effect local markets and competition. Given that wheat and bread are running out in urban areas and that the October wheat harvest will be far below average (Made admitted this in an August 30 conversation with Victor Angelo), provision of wheat would be addressing an increasing food security concern.

17. COMMENT. (C) Over the last year, Zimbabwean Cabinet ministers have frequently contradicted one another. On top of this, there now appears to be a stalemate within the Zimbabwe Cabinet regarding either accepting outside, BT, or U.S. donated food aid. There are clearly those who want as little outside food as possible so that GOZ can control the distribution. There could also be a contingent that is blocking approval to burnish their anti-imperialist credentials.

18. (C) Even if the GOZ finally signs the MOU and allows the 17500 MT swap, Zimbabwe will still need 1 million tons of maize over the next several months to avert widespread starvation. The GOZ has not done enough to facilitate these imports and there are certainly "radicals" in the Cabinet and ZANU-PF who prefer to minimize the internationally donated food so that ZANU-PF and the GOZ control the bulk of food deliveries to the population. The Government is also under pressure to cover petrol imports and other obligations, and the little foreign exchange that is available will not be able to cover everything. If Zimbabwe ultimately rejects the swap, the likelihood that the country would accept further donations of BT maize in the near term is remote, and we would have to pursue alternative actions, such as the Emerson Trust wheat possibility. END COMMENT.
SULLIVAN